

Description

Axial Compression Tool and method of use

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to a tool for installation of electrical connectors upon an electrical cable. More particularly, the invention is concerned with an axial compression tool, which accepts electrical connectors having a range of different connector interfaces.

[0003] Description of Related Art

[0004] There have been advancements in connectors adapted for installation by compression fit. U.S. Patent Application No.: 10/708,278 "Axial Compression Electrical Connector" filed February 20, 2003 by Islam et al, assigned to Andrew Corporation of Orland Park, Illinois, as is the present invention, describes several embodiments of such connectors. Electrical connectors adapted for installation upon

electrical cables by axial compression are field installable using an axial compression hand tool. The prior axial compression tools typically comprise a lever action, which actuates a chuckhead towards the connector interface of the electrical connector. The electrical cable and the electrical connector are fed through a stop against which the chuckhead actuates to axially compress the connector components together, permanently forming the electrical connection between the connector body and the electrical cable.

[0005] The prior chuckhead is adapted to engage the electrical connector at the face of the connector interface. Therefore, the prior tools are typically supplied dedicated to a specific connector type, such as Type F, and or include a range of different exchangeable chuckheads, one for each desired connector interface. Maintaining a range of different connector interface specific tools and or exchanging the chuckheads as different connector interfaces are encountered, increases installation tooling requirements and labor costs.

[0006] If there is any axial misalignment during the compression, the chuckheads may damage the inner conductor, sealing, and or insulator assemblies of the connector interface.

Also, the compression force may push the inner conductor into the cable and away from the connector. This also may result in unnecessary labor and costs to repair and or replace any damaged components of the electrical connector and electrical cable assembly.

[0007] Competition within the electrical connector industry has focused attention on equipment and tooling costs, as well as time requirements for installation of electrical connectors.

[0008] Therefore, it is an object of the invention to provide an apparatus that overcomes deficiencies in the prior art.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0009] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed description of the embodiments given below, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

[0010] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an axial compression tool according to one embodiment of the invention with a connector/cable assembly in place for axial compression, the cable clamp opened for clarity.

[0011] FIG. 2 is an exploded, perspective view of the axial com-

pression tool shown in Figure 1.

[0012] FIG. 3 is an enlarged, perspective view of a further embodiment of a push mechanism attached to a cradle with a connector/cable assembly in place, with the clamp arm opened for clarity.

[0013] FIG. 4 is an enlarged, perspective view of a cable end portion of the axial compression tool showing a cable clamp, opened for clarity, with a connector / cable assembly in place.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional, perspective view of the axial compression tool of Figure 1 with a connector / cable assembly in place and the cable clamp opened for clarity.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] For purposes of illustration, exemplary embodiment(s) of the present invention are shown in Figures 1–5. As shown in Figure 1, a body 10 comprises a cable end 12 and a lever end 14. On the body 10 and towards the cable end 12 there is an open cavity 16 adapted to receive an axially movable cradle 18.

[0016] The movement of the cradle 18 is managed by its connection to a lever mechanism 20 as shown, for example in Figure 2. The lever mechanism 20 links a handle 22 to the body 10 via a handle axle 24. Pivotal movements of the

handle 22 about the handle axle 24 actuate axial movements of the cradle 18 via, for example, a push shank 28 coupled at a lever end 14 to an offset area of the handle 22 by a support axle 32. A push axle 30 links the push shank 28 to the lever end 14 of the push mechanism 26. The cable end 12 of the push shank 28 may have, for example, a forked arm 34 to receive the push mechanism 26. The cable end 12 of the push mechanism 26 may be coupled to the cradle 18, for example by a cradle support nut 36 and a cradle washer 37 or the like. The cradle 18 is removably attached to permit interchangeability between different types of cradles 18.

[0017] The push mechanism 26 may comprise a push bar 38, a push spring 39, a stop 40, a push nut 41, and a key 42. The push mechanism 26 axially slides through the body 10 of the tool and is guided by, for example, a guide sleeve 44. The guide sleeve 44 slidably aligns the push mechanism 26 with the longitudinal axis of the tool. The push spring 39 biases the tool into an open position by pushing against the lever end 14 of the guide sleeve 44. On the cable end 12 of the push mechanism 26, the key 42 is inserted into a push aperture 46 formed in the cradle 18 and is fastened in place, for example, via the cradle

support nut 36 and the cradle washer 37. The key 42 helps to prevent any rotational movements of the cradle 18 with respect to the push mechanism 26.

[0018] Electrical connectors adapted for use with this invention are disclosed, for example, in U.S. Patent Application No.: 10/708,278. An axial compression of a connector to cable 51 interconnection is made, for example, to press fit a cable clamp sleeve 48 into a connector body 50, whereby an outer conductor of a cable 51 is coupled to the connector body 50. In use, the cable 51 and connector pair assembled for compression is placed into the cradle 18 with a cable clamp sleeve 48 of the connector body 50 mating with a shoulder clamp 54 removably attached to the cable end 12 of the cradle 18 by, for example, a plurality of shoulder clamp screws 57, as shown, for example, in Figures 2 and 3. Alternatively, the cable clamp sleeve may be formed integrated into the cable end 14 of the cradle 18. To more securely retain a compression shoulder 56 of the connector body 50 upon the shoulder clamp 54, a clamp arm 58 may be rotatably attached to the shoulder clamp 54, for example via a hinge axle 60. To retain the clamp arm 58 in a closed position, a contact 62 of the shoulder clamp 54 may include a magnetic contact, or the like. Al-

ternatively, a mechanical clasp, latch, pin, spring, screw, or clip may be applied.

[0019] As shown in the exemplary embodiments, the cradle 18 may have the form of a box with the top and cable end 12 sides open. Alternatively, the cradle 18 may be formed as any structure that connects the push mechanism 26 to the shoulder clamp 54, such as a U-shaped bracket or the like. An open space between the lever end 14 and the cable end 12 of the selected cradle 18 configuration provides clearance for a variety of different connector interface(s) 64 such that when the connector is mounted upon the compression shoulder 56, axial compression forces applied by the tool are directed to the body 50 and not the connector interface 64.

[0020] The cable end 12 of the body 10 acts as a stop during compression of the cable clamp sleeve 48 into the connector body 50. A cable support 66 at the cable end 12 accommodates a cable clamp 68, as shown, for example, in Figure 4. The cable clamp 68 may be removably attached to the cable support 66. The cable clamp 68, positioned on the lever end 14 of the cable support 66, may include two opposed movable arms 70. The movable arms 70 may pivot, spreadable apart and together, about a

common axle 72. The movable arms 70 may be biased into a closed position via one or more bias spring(s) 73, or the like. Alternatively, a magnetic contact, a mechanical clasp, latch, pin, spring, screw, or clip may be used. A cable opening 74 formed by the movable arms 70 in the closed position is large enough to accept an outer diameter of the cable 51, but it is not able to pass the larger diameter of the cable clamp sleeve 48. The cable clamp 68 allows movement of a cable 51 through its cable opening 74 and through the cable support 66. During rotation of the handle 22, the shoulder clamp 54 and the cable clamp 68 advance toward one another to axially compress the connector body 50 and cable clamp sleeve 48 between them.

[0021] The tool is adaptable to connector families linked to a range of different cable 51 diameters via exchange of the shoulder clamp 54 and cable clamp 68 assemblies. Alternatively, the shoulder clamp 54 and the cable clamp 68 may, for example, slide into slots or snap into other forms of spring biased retainers formed in the cradle 18 and cable end 12 of the cavity 16, respectively. In simplified embodiments, the tool may be dedicated to a single cable 51 diameter and connector interface 64 by permanently at-

taching and or integrating the shoulder clamp 54 into the cradle 18. Similarly, the cable clamp 68 may be integrated with the cable support 66.

[0022] The body 10 also may include mounting hole(s) 76 for removably attaching the tool to a desired surface, such as a workbench. As shown, for example, in Figure 5, one or more mounting hole(s) 76 may be located in the cavity 16 and or the body 10, counter sunk to avoid interference with the axial movements of the cradle 18.

[0023] From the foregoing, one skilled in the art will appreciate that the invention provides a single cost effective tool to axially compress connectors having any of a wide range of different connector interfaces 64 to cables 51 without damaging the connector interface 64 and or the inner workings of each connector.

[0024] Table of Parts

10	body
12	cable end
14	lever end
16	cavity
18	cradle
20	lever mechanism
22	handle

24	handle axle
26	push mechanism
28	push shank
30	push axle
32	support axle
34	forked arm
36	cradle support nut
37	cradle washer
38	push bar
39	push spring
40	stop
41	push nut
42	key
44	guide sleeve
46	push aperture
48	cable clamp sleeve
50	connector body
51	cable
54	shoulder clamp
56	compression shoulder
57	shoulder clamp screw
58	clamp arm
60	hinge axle
62	contact

64	connector interface
66	cable support
68	cable clamp
70	movable arm
72	common axle
73	bias spring
74	cable opening
76	mounting hole

[0025] Where in the foregoing description reference has been made to ratios, integers, components or modules having known equivalents then such equivalents are herein incorporated as if individually set forth.

[0026] While the present invention has been illustrated by the description of the embodiments thereof, and while the embodiments have been described in considerable detail, it is not the intention of the applicant to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details, representative apparatus, methods, and illustrative examples shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such details without departure from the

spirit or scope of applicant's general inventive concept. Further, it is to be appreciated that improvements and/or modifications may be made thereto without departing from the scope or spirit of the present invention as defined by the following claims.